



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – American Movie Treasures Program Launch

**Remarks of Ambassador Bleich
at the Launch of 2011
National Film and Sound Archive
American Movie Treasures Program, Canberra**

(As prepared for delivery – February 26, 2011)

It is a great honor to be here tonight to launch the 2011 American Movie Treasures program here at the National Film and Sound Archives.

I'm very grateful to David Boden and the NFSA staff, particularly Cynthia Piromalli for all of their hard work to make this happen. Or as the king would say: "thank ya, thank ya very much.

I'm also very proud that the U.S. Embassy has again supported this series. The series is drawn from major U.S. film archives including the motion picture arts and sciences, the UCLA film and television archive, the George Eastman house, the Library of Congress, and the Museum of Modern Art.

Now if you have access to the greatest and richest archives of film ever assembled, and you have to choose one for launch night, just one film that represents quintessential, iconic American film-making. Then I am sorry but there is only one choice. It is not Frank Capra, Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, Stephen Spielberg. There is only one name that fits the bill.

Elvis.

And if you are going to pick one Elvis Film, the one that most fans and film critics consider the best Elvis Presley film it is "Viva Las Vegas."

Now I say most, because in 1964, a lot of critics didn't appreciate the film very much. The New York Times described it as pleasant but "as unimportant as a banana split." But somehow it has stood the test of time. And this is so even though 1964 was one of the great years in cinema. The only other movies from that year that are still shown are the classics – My Fair Lady, Mary Poppins, Dr. Strangelove, Island of the Blue Dolphins, Marnie, Night of the Iguana, and the Unsinkable Molly Brown.



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So what makes Viva Las Vegas a movie that people still want to see nearly half a century after it was released?

Part of it was Elvis. But Elvis actually had a second film out that year called “Kissin’ Cousins” that virtually no one remembers. Part of it was the genuine chemistry between Elvis and Ann-Margaret -- they had a rumored affair and years later Ann-Margaret referred to Elvis as her soulmate. Part of it was the flashy musical numbers, the glamorous locale, and a great race sequence. But most of all, I think, it is the pure joy of the film. It is just fun. And sometimes, just sitting back and having fun, is important.

In the next two months you’ll see some other iconic American films including the Cary Grant in “The Awful Truth,” Gary Cooper in “Ball of Fire,” Preston Sturges’ classic “The Miracle of Morgan’s Creek,” and “My Man Godfrey” starring Carole Lombard.

So with that, I hope you all enjoy the film. And, as the king would say: “Viva, Viva, Las Vegas!”